DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 318 021 CS 212 307

AUTHOR Dreyer, Diana Y.
TITLE Diversity in the Writing Workshop: Interaction, Acquisition, and Integration.
PUB DATE Mar 90
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (41st, Chicago, IL, March 22-24, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Environment; College English; *College Second Language Programs; *English (Second Language); *Freshman Composition; Higher Education; Intercultural Communication; *Native Speakers; Writing Improvement; *Writing Workshops
IDENTIFIERS *Nonnative Speakers; Slippery Rock University PA

ABSTRACT

Several sections of a regular College Writing 1 class at Slippery Rock University in Pennsylvania are comprised of a fairly equal number of native and nonnative speakers of English (advanced international students). This diverse writers' community engages throughout the 15-week fall semester in a workshop approach to writing development, following the procedure outlined by A. R. Gere and R. D. Abbott. In this procedure, groups of three or four writers share work in progress according to the following guidelines: the first writer reads aloud his or her selection twice, neither commenting nor apologizing for the writing. Other group members write responses to the text following the initial reading and during the second. The first response is a general impression summarizing the text's meaning. The second focuses on the language of the text, especially noting what listeners like and dislike. Oral discussion follows as these notes are shared. Such a procedure allows the writer to see and hear the text in a writing community and to receive useful suggestions for possible revisions. Audiotapes of these writing groups enable teachers to hear how such arrangements work. The quantity of talk in such student-centered activity offers second language students a "rich bath" of language and encourages native and nonnative speakers alike to use and develop their communicative performance. (SR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED318021

Diversity in the Writing Workshop: Interaction, Acquisition, and Integration

Diana Y. Dreyer

Slippery Rock University

In the fall of 1980, I first encountered my first three nonnative speakers (NNS) in a classroom situation: Nick from Greece, Guillermo from Peru, and Eduardo from Brazil. These three young men sat together throughout the semester toward the back of the classroom, seldom interacting with their 19 native speaker (NS) counterparts during their enrollment in College Writing I, a required freshman-level composition course--a situation raising a number of questions for me but ones I had no idea about how to respond to at that time.

Subsequently, I completed several credit hours of course work in second language acquisition studies, as well as two summers of employment at Indiana University of Pennsylvania's American Language Institute. Thus, in 1985, I was comfortable with my new assignment at Slippery Rock University: to teach a special section of College Writing I, one composed entirely of nonnative speakers, a separate but equal arrangement I supposed to be sound pedagogy. These advanced students were an exuberant crew, delighting in the opportunity to gather three times per week in a school-sponsored setting. Two native speakers who were

CS212307

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

DIANA Y. DREYER

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

enrolled in the class by advisement error elected to stay; however, they remained reticent throughout, which was obvious to me as a teacher and verified by a series of videotapes shot periodically throughout the semester for a colleague's research project on questioning patterns in native and nonnative speaker classrooms (see Fink, 1987). Nevertheless, these two native speakers reported at the end of the semester that they believed they had profited immeasurably by exposure to such a cosmopolitan discourse community (see Fink, 1987). This phenomenon raised a whole new set of questions for me, primarily regarding classroom behavior of minority groups. A few nonnative speakers in a group of native speakers often tend to remain silent, robbing themselves of the interaction so necessary to language acquisition. In Fink's study, a small number of NS speakers in a group of NNS behaved similarly.

During this same time period, I read Alice Roy's speculative article (1984) in which she provides a theoretical rationale for combining native and nonnative speakers in a writing classroom. Roy points out that shared goals, strategies to reach those goals, and the amount of access to and psychological satisfaction with communication in the target language are features lending support to uniting first and second language learners in introductory college writing classes, support also evidenced in both second language acquisition and sociolinguistics studies. If such classroom settings allow ample opportunity for students

of different backgrounds and cultures to interact in large and small groups, the potential exists for each to learn much from one another--not only about being a member of a community of writers but also about being a member of the world community.

Thus, by 1987, in consultation with Slippery Rock University's Office of International Studies, overseers of increasing numbers of international students, SRU was no longer segregating the more advanced nonnative speakers in English instruction. Instead, we reserve half the seats in my regular College Writing I sections during regular registration, seats later assigned to the incoming international students upon their arrival in late August, thus providing classes comprised of a fairly equal number of native and nonnative speakers. This diverse writers' community engages throughout the fifteen week fall semester in a workshop approach to writing development, following the procedure outlined by Gere and Abbott (1985a) in their research on fifth, eighth, and eleventh/twelfth graders.

In this procedure, groups of three or four writers share work in progress according to the following guidelines: the first writer reads aloud her selection twice, with a brief interval between the two readings, neither commenting nor apologizing for the writing. Other group members write responses to the text following the initial reading and during the second. The first response is a general impression summarizing the text's meaning. The second focuses on the language of the text, especially noting

what listeners like and dislike. Oral discussion follows as these notes are shared. Such a procedure allows the writer to hear and see her text in a writing community and to receive useful suggestions for possible revisions. (Incidentally, an extremely useful videocassette demonstrating this process is now available, a demonstration both my native and nonnative speakers have responded favorably to and profited from. See works cited handout.)

Audiotapes of these writing group tapes enable teachers to see how such arrangements work. I'd like to share some excerpts from such a tape illustrating the kinds of ways students of different linguistic backgrounds can aid each others' writing processes. These conversations occurred early in the semester, uttered by a group of three--two native and one nonnative speaker. Their initial writing assignment involved interviewing another student in the class in order to compile that information for an article introducing each student to others in the class. What follows is the exchange following the first reader's--a native speaker (NS1)--initial reading of his text.

NS1 That's it. You guys got to take notes. Start writing down stuff. Just write down stuff about. . .

NS2 Stuff about. . .

NS1 Yeah, what you want to know more about or what sounded awkward or whatever.

NNS You know what? We could stop this (tape recorder) for a moment. Should we?

NS2 She wanted us to keep it on.

NNS While we are writing, I don't think it's. . .

NS1 She still wants us to.

NS2 Yeah. She said she wants it on. She said she doesn't care. She said even if we start talking about the rain or something like that.

NNS OK (All laugh.)

While this exchange departs from the procedure outlined, it reflects the members' concern about the novelty of the taping procedure and the potential constraint of sharing one's writing aloud--in itself more than likely a rare occurrence. Interestingly, the tape recording process itself was referred to only briefly thereafter during the duration of the fifty minute tape. As I circulated about the room, pausing to listen to each group's progress, I distracted this group's talk about writing several minutes after the exchange above, apparently serving somehow to remind them of the machine's presence, which prompted the second native speaker to question the tuning of the volume switch. Later, as the second native speaker began to read, the first commented about moving the recorder to better catch the reader's voice. And finally, just prior to the third writer's first reading, the first native speaker urged the group to move

along, commenting, "Half the tape's used,"--perhaps a new variation on clock watching. The small quantity of such references and the naturalness of the remainder of the commentary seem to confirm Gere and Abbott's (1985) findings that the novelty of the situation soon diminishes and students pay little attention to the recording procedure.

After NS1's second reading, the following commentary took place.

NS1 Well, now that I read it, it really sounds awkward. I'm skipping around and stuff. I realize I want to put something. . .

NS2 I think you should talk about stuff that Jacques does up here. Like where he stays. Does he like it up here? And more stuff about that. Does he play sports up here?

NS1 Occasionally.

NS2 More about Spanish.

NNS Yeah.

NS2 About his sisters.

NS1 OK.

NS2 How about you?

NNS Yeah. I put the same thing. I put that he wasn't giving anything about his background. You know; it's more of what Jacques is now and. . .

NS2 Yeah.

NNS And what his dad is. . . and where he stays. I think you should speak about, you know, his past.

NS2 Yeah.

NS1 All right.

NNS Uh, his school and stuff, whatever, you know, his family relationships; I put that down as well.

NS2 His major or

NNS Yeah.

NS2 His curriculum.

This exchange attests to the seriousness with which these young men approached the task. Furthermore, the first native speaker received valuable feedback from his listeners, feedback similar in content, enhancing not only his audience awareness but also attesting to the efficacy of such a culturally diverse group--diverse in language and cultural background yet remarkably similar in their expectations of this particular piece of writing. Such commentary can have a powerful effect on NS1's next draft and, very likely, future writing tasks as well.

A later passage from the tape proceeded as follows, after the nonnative speaker's two readings of his piece on a classmate from Malaysia. The entire transcript points up the NNS's nervousness about what must have been a first for him--reading aloud his work to peers. He later told me of a strong aversion

to sharing any of his writing except, oddly enough, with teachers, apparently the only sharing he had done at that point. Notice the introductory supporting comments provided by the two native speakers, perhaps exhibiting a sensitivity to the apprehension of the nonnative speaker on the part of the native speakers

NNS Shoot. Kill me.

NS1 You want to start?

NS2 I thought it was very descriptive. That was good, smooth writing.

NNS Uh huh?

NS2 You had, uh, chink eyes.

NNS Yeah. You don't like. . .?

NS1 That sounds maybe insulting.

NS2 Yeah. NNS It does?

NS2 Should be oriental eyes.

NNS OK.

Here the native speakers have zeroed in at the word level, calling the nonnative speaker's attention to a term that most USA natives view as derogatory, a useful directive for the nonnative speaker, and again one increasing audience awareness. Shortly thereafter, other aspects of the writing in question are discussed.

NS2 Does she like it up here? How does she feel about Slippery Rock?

NNS OK. I didn't add that.

NS1 Try to make it more personal. It sounds like a documentary, you know, like on TV. Like how to describe the zulu bird or whatever.

NNS Uh huh. OK, you mean I'm just sort of describing it and not. . .

NS2 It's like you had a tape recorder on when you were talking to her and you wrote down everything you guys talked about.

NS1 You could put more things in your own words of what she did.

NNS OK, what you mean is instead of saying, "When I asked her . . . . And she said. . .." I should say, "What she feels is . . . ."

This brief interchange addresses both content and form of the nonnative speaker's writing, adding the context of the documentary idea to illustrate an opinion. The NNS responds with examples from his paper to elicit clarification of his understanding of his partners' directives. After several more such responses to this third piece, the period draws to a close with the final exchange.

NS1 It really tells a lot about her.

NS2 It really does. I mean, like, it's worded, it's worded. . .

NS1 After you read it, it's like you know almost everything about her.

NS2 Yeah, how she feel about things in nature.

NS1 But it's because it's so descriptive. I think you should try to word it in a different way to say the same information without making it sound like a documentary.

NNS OK.

NS2 Yeah, maybe, I don't know but maybe it's "When I asked her. . . ." Just put it in her own words. You know, how you got that impression.

NNS Umm hmm.

NS2 Besides that, it was. . .

NNS OK, thanks.

NS1 See you later.

These excerpts reflect the general tone and content of this particular tape, the group primarily focusing its attention on the three pieces of writing under scrutiny, remaining on task throughout the exchange. All three writers left the classroom with new ideas for revision and improvement of their existing drafts as is the case in many of the of the other tapes recorded during the course of the semester.

I'd like to be able to report that a combination of native and nonnative speakers and this sort of classroom collaboration

consistently produces such positive effects; however, some tapes demonstrate the process gone awry. One group, another mixture of native and nonative speakers--all soccer buffs--spent little time on the writing procedure and a great deal of time discussing the sport. Another group, all native speakers and all less skilled writers, proved to be similarly unskilled in providing the quality and quantity of responses exhibited in the group excerpted in this paper, indicating a connection between talk and writing quality. And sometimes peer advice seemed to me to result in making papers worse rather than better, though this might be debated, given Gere and Stevens' (1985b) suggestion that writing groups and teachers often base their reactions on differing assumptions: writing groups that writing is rhetorical, that is to influence or affect a reader; teachers that writing is pedagogical, an exercise training use of specific forms.

Nevertheless, the quantity of talk taking place in such student-centered activity encourages and enables native and nonnative speakers alike to use and develop their communicative performance, each learning from the other more about writing and a number of other things as well. Rigg and Allen (1989) assert that "second language students need to be with first language students. . . .[in] a rich bath of language. . . . constantly engaged in meaningful activities. . . in which the students talk with each other (pp. ix-xi). In a writing workshop, students are engaged, so much more so than those three nonnative speakers I

encountered back in 1980 and the two native speakers inadvertently placed in the ESL section a few years later. This engagement shapes writing as diverse students combine forces to make meaning in their groups and on their papers, a diversity that enriches all of us.

Works Cited

Fink, D. F. (1987). A descriptive study of teacher and student questioning patterns in university ESL and native writing classes. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA.

Gere, A. R., & Abbott, R. D. (1985). Talking about writing: The language of writing groups. Research in the Teaching of English, 19, 362-381.

Gere, A. R., & Stevens, R. (1985). The language of writing groups: How writing shapes revision. In S. W. Freedman (Ed.), The acquisition of written language: Response and revision (pp. 85-105). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Hill, C., & Mallon, T. (Producers). (1988). Student writing groups :Demonstrating the process [videocassette]. Tacoma, WA: Wordshop Productions, Inc.

Rigg, P., & Allen, V.G. (Eds.). (1989). When they don't all speak English. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of

English.

Roy, A. M. (1984). Alliance for literacy: Teaching non-native speakers and speakers of nonstandard English together. College Composition and Communication, 35,439-448.